Show #407
Air Date: November 18, 1991

WGBH-TV
125 Western Avenue, Boston, MA, 02134
Transcripts: Journal Graphics, Inc., 1535 Grant Street, Denver, CO 80203

The American *Experience*

G-Men: The Rise of J. Edgar Hoover

Written and Produced by Irv Drasnin

JUDY CRICHTON ..... Executive Producer
MARGARET DRAIN ..... Senior Producer
DAVID McCULLOUGH ..... Series Host

THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE is a co-production of WGBH/Boston, WNET/New York and KCET/Los Angeles. Major funding for this series is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and by the financial support of Public Television Viewers. Corporate funding is provided by Aetna.

WGBH Educational Foundation and WNET/Thirteen.
Copyright © 1991 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

For information about buying or renting videocassettes of THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, contact PBS Video, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA, Washington 22314, or call 1-800-424-7963 or 703-739-5[illegible].

This transcript may not be produced in whole or in part without permission.

Transcript produced by Journal Graphics, Inc.

Transcript Charges: $5.00 by check or money order. You may also order by phone with MasterCard, Visa or American Express: call (303) 831-9000 any day 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Central time. There is a $2.50 surcharge for this service, which gets the transcript to you quicker.

G-Men: The Rise of J. Edgar Hoover

DAVID McCULLOUGH, Host: Good evening and welcome to The American Experience. I'm David McCullough. In the hard years of the Depression when the federal government was trying to cope with a variety of problems, a federal bureau to fight crime seemed like a good, smart, up-to-date idea and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the FBI, and its agents — its brisk, businesslike G-men — got results.

But it was J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, the G-man, who ran the show, who made himself the show for nearly 50 years. Hoover ruled from behind a huge, raised desk at the end of a 35-foot office, a small, pudgy man with a bulldog face and a colossal ego. He never married, never lived anywhere but Washington, D.C. and never wanted to.

His obsession with routine was famous. He ate his lunch every day at exactly the same time at the same table in the same restaurant — Harvey's on Connecticut Avenue — and usually ordered the same thing— cottage cheese, grapefruit and black coffee.

President Franklin Roosevelt liked a man who got results and Roosevelt greatly enjoyed the spicy secrets that Hoover passed on to him about the private lives of important people; and it was Roosevelt, in 1936, who ordered Hoover to start gathering political information, a decision of long-lasting effect on American life and not always for the best.

In 1945, only a month after Roosevelt's death, the new President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, wrote this in his diary. *[reads]* "We want no Gestapo or secret police. FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in sex-life scandals and plain blackmail. This must stop!"— underscored.

But it didn't stop— not in Truman's time, not under six more presidents, not as long as Hoover lasted.

J. EDGAR HOOVER, FBI Director: We must not for a moment lose sight of our goal, to teach the criminal that, regardless of his subterfuges, his squirming, his twisting and slimy wriggling, he cannot escape the one inexorable rule of law enforcement— "You can't get away with it."

NARRATOR: At a time when crime in the country seemed out of control, tough talk was big box office. In the troubled years of the Great Depression, a public wanting to believe that help was on the way lined up to see the making of an American hero. Above the marquee, above the vaudeville act and the Hollywood feature, top billing went to a scenario written in Washington. This wasn't just popular entertainment. This was popular politics. In the 1930's the stage was set for J. Edgar Hoover.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: The Federal Bureau of Investigation is as close to you as your nearest telephone. It seeks to be your protector in all matters within its jurisdiction. It belongs to you.

FILM NARRATOR: The G-Men— this is a bureau of scientific crime detection— new, modern, up-to-the-minute, in action day and night. The FBI never sleeps. The G-men have become a legend.

So what's the mystery behind their badge?

NARRATOR: Often, it seemed not so much a mystery as mythology and as in myth, it wouldn't always be clear what was real and what wasn't. For an entire generation of Americans, it was Hoover's G-men to the rescue.

TED ROSACK, Former FBI Agent: They had a lot of shootouts, glamour stories. This thing got a lot of press. They were winning. They were upholding law and order and they were protecting the innocent, throwing the criminals in jail. And they won every shootout.

You know, these things impress a kid and, "Hey, I want to be one of those guys. They always win. They're on the right side."

1st BOY: Gee, Mr. Hoover, your G-men sure are good. I'd like to be one when I grow up.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: Well, if you work hard and play hard and live clean, you certainly will be one.

Mr. ROSACK: You got to be on the winning side. You're supporting the law. You're getting rid of these bad people.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: David, I would like to know what your impressions have been in the studies that you've carried on in New York.

2nd BOY: I learned that crime does not pay and the difference between right and wrong.

Mr. ROSACK: He was a hero. He was a guy that was saving the nation. He was saving all of the victims of crime. He was doing the job that the people expected him to do.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: We want you all therefore to go back and be kind of so-called "aides" to the G-men of the country. Each one of you are [sic] fine young chaps and we want to be proud to have you in our organization some of these days.

Rep. DON EDWARDS, (D) California, Former FBI Agent: Well, Hoover never would have been able to last if he hadn't had the glory of the G-men days. That built the myth and the myth lasted and people were loath to say, "The emperor has no clothes." Why, this great myth is a beautiful American tradition and you're sort of subversive if you shoot it down.

WALTER TROHAN, Journalist: The myth grew almost by itself, like a mushroom and it kept getting bigger and bigger and got beyond the truth, let's say. It became— we wanted to feel that there was somebody protecting and guarding us.

NARRATOR: For 48 years, under eight presidents, Hoover saw himself as the nation's guardian, a role that made him among the most popular and powerful Americans of his time.

RICHARD GID POWERS, Hoover Biographer: I think that Hoover's place in American life, in American history is an enormous one and if you leave him out, you've left out one of the keys to what America was and what it became in the 20th century.

NARRATOR: To understand Hoover's rise to power is to understand the America of the 1920's and 30's, a land of opportunity— for gangsters. The public was drawn to Al Capone, king of the bootleggers. Prohibition and the media had created the impression that criminals had taken over the streets, that you could get away with it.

Back then, not many had heard about J. Edgar Hoover, but they knew about Bonnie and Clyde, bank robbers who shot their way into the public's imagination. The successful outlaw became a symbol of unsuccessful government, a challenge to authority.

LEWIS J. VALENTINE, New York City Police Commissioner: If crooks, thugs and assassins believe members of this department are going to count 10 before shooting, they're seriously mistaken. The order is reversed. Where criminals are concerned, we will shoot first and count 10 after.

NARRATOR: On the day Bonnie and Clyde drove down a road to Louisiana, nobody counted 10. Local lawmen couldn't afford to take any chances. Folk heroes don't die easily. Neither would the political reality that crime had become a national issue.

Sen. ROBERT WAGNER, Sr., (D) New York: This reign of unspeakable atrocity cannot be dealt with like ordinary crime. There must be a complete mobilization of every man and every means and the launching of a crushing attack upon the lawless on all the fronts.

NARRATOR: In 1932, the frontline of crime in America stretched across a quiet corner of the New Jersey countryside. No other crime directly attacked a society's values more than the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby. The clues were leading nowhere. An arrest wouldn't be made for two years. In the meantime, the nation watched and waited.

The Lindberghs came to represent the frustrations and fears of millions. This wasn't the remote and sometimes romanticized crime of speakeasies and back alleys. This was a threat reaching into the American home and to the halls of Congress.

Sen. ROSCOE PATTERSON, (R) Missouri: There have been 283 kidnapping cases in the United States during the past year. Thirteen of the victims have been murdered. The kidnapping of Colonel and Mrs. Lindbergh's baby accentuates the importance of both the federal and the state governments using all of their force and power to blot out this worst of all rackets.

NARRATOR: But leaders seemed powerless. No longer just a police problem, this was a crisis of confidence no government could ignore. Kidnapping was made a federal crime. For the first time in the nation's history, federal agents would be leading a national manhunt against a common criminal.

HOMER CUMMINGS, U.S. Attorney General: The federal government, with the support of an aroused public opinion, will not leave the nation helplessly at the mercy of the underworld. No matter how long it takes, this department will continue the fight until law and order prevail over the gangsters, the kidnappers, the racketeers and all other perpetrators of predatory crime. This work will be under the immediate direction of J. Edgar Hoover, the experienced Director of the Division of Investigation.

NARRATOR: Soon the news would spread. There was now a federal cop on the crime beat. An anxious public might well have wanted to know more about J. Edgar Hoover.

Hoover was born on New Year's Day, 1895, in a modest neighbor-

hood not five minutes' walk from Capitol Hill. He would live in this house 43 years, never marry and not move until his mother's death. He was almost literally born into the federal bureaucracy. His father and grandfather before him were civil servants.

Growing up, the world outside his door was almost exclusively white, Protestant, segregated and resistant to change. As a captain in the high school Cadet Corps and beyond, Hoover would remain ever faithful to his beginnings.

Mr. POWERS: He came out of middle-class, small town American life and he saw Protestant, white-dominated society as very close to the ideal. He participated in institutions — the church, the public schools, the Sunday schools, youth groups and so forth, so on — that he interpreted as defending very much an ideal order.

NARRATOR: It was an ideal order that couldn't last. Waves of immigrants, economic unrest and world events were already closing in on Hoover's world in 1917, the year he earned a night school law degree and became a clerk at the Department of Justice. It was in the Department's new Anti-Radical Division that he found a role to confirm his sense of self and country. It was a time right after World War I when many Americans saw their way of life in utter peril.

Mr. POWERS: The whole scene under Attorney General Palmer in 1920 and '21 was of terror about the Russian Revolution. We had even invaded Russia, along with, I think, England, to do away with the Bolsheviks and there was great fear in this country.

NARRATOR: It would be known as the "Red Scare." On June 2, 1919, almost simultaneously, eight bombs exploded in eight cities. It seemed as if the Russian Revolution was at America's doorstep, including the Washington home of A. Mitchell Palmer. The Attorney General survived. The nation wasn't too sure about itself.

For the government, the headlines were a challenge. For Hoover, it was an opportunity— his first important enemy.

Rep. EDWARDS: The thing that helped to make Hoover's reputation was the Communist menace, the Red Scare early in his career, where, after World War I, people were hounded, organizations were investigated. He kept preaching about the Communist menace way back then.

NARRATOR: They were called the "Palmer raids," but Hoover was in charge.

Mr. POWERS: Hoover was given the job of controlling the Communist movement in America in 1919. He educated himself by reading the classics by Marx, by Lenin. He read Communist magazines and newspapers. He interviewed Communists.

And I would say that if there was one notable feature in Hoover's attitude towards radicalism, it is that he never disbelieved a word a Communist said. He called them "masters of deceit," he called them liars, but he always believed it when they said that they were about to take over this country, that country.

NARRATOR: This film from the 1920's dramatized Hoover's belief in the Bureau's crusade against internal enemies. Hoover, once a Sunday school teacher, saw it as a neverending struggle against political seduction as carried on by savages of civilization.

In the foreign language press and labor newspapers, Hoover found

the seeds of subversion. His critics found a self-appointed monitor of political ideas. For critics and Hoover alike, it was a cautionary tale.

Rep. EDWARDS: Hoover felt that the country was endangered by men and women and children who had political and religious beliefs and habits that he couldn't understand.

NARRATOR: The government rounded up thousands of aliens considered dangerous radicals, but only a few hundred were found subject to deportation. Hoover had collected the names of some 60,000 suspected radicals, a file he would never close. For Hoover, they represented a threat that would be his lifelong preoccupation.

Hardly had the last boat left the dock when other voices of dissent were heard arguing the case against the government. According to a report signed by a dozen prominent lawyers, the threat was to the Constitution. The round-up and detention of suspected aliens raised issues of dissent and due process. In 67 pages, they cited violation after violation of civil liberties. Hoover's career was in jeopardy.

A congressional investigation of the Palmer raids almost cost him his job. When the new Attorney General swore in a new Director of the Bureau, Hoover not only was spared, he moved one step closer to the top. Three years later, he'd be there.

He was 29 years old, but already an experienced bureaucrat, about to usher in a new era at the FBI.

Mr. TROHAN: There's always been select corps, usually of soldiers, throughout history and Hoover made one in the police.

NARRATOR: Hoover inherited a bureau whose reputation was tarnished by political favors and patronage. He was determined to remake it in his own image.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: There is nothing mysterious about the manner in which the Federal Bureau of Investigation works. Its formula is a simple one— intensive training, carefully investigated and highly efficient personnel, plus rigid requirements in regard to conduct, intelligence and integrity.

PATRICK MURPHY, Former Police Commissioner: He was very authoritarian and he ran the FBI like a dictator. FBI agents did not have rights back in those days.

Mr. ROSACK: We had the dress code— no beards, no moustaches. You wore white shirts, striped ties, conservative suits, wingtip shoes and, in the early days, hats. Here again, that was part of the discipline. It was just something that you went along with. I didn't wear a blue shirt until after Hoover died.

NARRATOR: The rebuilding began and it was a bureaucracy that would be held accountable in every way, if only to Hoover.

Mr. MURPHY: I think he looked for someone who would conform, be willing to come into the FBI and do what he was told. Don't think independently, even if you are a lawyer, even if you are an accountant. This is not the kind of place for creativity or dissent, other than be creative to make the Bureau look good and to make Mr. Hoover look good.

Rep. EDWARDS: At our graduation at the Department of Justice after our training course, I remember that this rather small man, rather pudgy, walked out and went up to the lectern and looked at us

down there and — I'll really never forget it — grabbed it and looked over at us and said, very solemnly, "I just want to tell you this. If you get drunk, out you go. If you fool around with women and stuff, out you go and don't come sniveling to me that you have a family or anything else. That's it." And he turned on his heel and walked out.

Mr. TROHAN: They would whisper when they'd tell you what the Chief said. He had the corps built, got esprit built up and he was a great man with them. He was a god, practically— at least, an archangel.

NARRATOR: As the 1930's began, what the Bureau and Hoover needed was an arch-devil, a popular cause. Again, Hoover would be helped by a frightened public, a nation threatened by economic and political failure, by social disorder and by the criminal of the decade. John Dillinger was the most wanted outlaw in FBI history and the most important.

Mr. POWERS: I think that Hoover, like many Americans, saw society as essentially a battle between law-abiding people and lawless people and this is, I think, a uniquely American fix on society.

NARRATOR: In 1934, in an Indiana jail, the law and the lawless stood side by side. For Dillinger, it looked like the end, like there could be no escape, but it was just the beginning of Hoover's epic struggle with an arch-enemy.

REPORTER: How did he act? Was he jolly?

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY: Yes, he sang part of the way.

REPORTER: What did he sing?

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY: "Get Along, Little Dog [sic], Get Along."

REPORTER: Is that so?

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY: Uh huh, and "The Last Roundup."

REPORTER: Did you see this toy gun at all in the car?

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY: I just got a glimpse of it, yes.

NARRATOR: He had escaped, using a toy gun whittled from a washboard, making his getaway in the Sheriff's car. A legend was in the making. In *Time* magazine, you could play the Dillinger game. To find him, just follow the dotted line.

ALSTON PURVIS, Son of Melvin Purvis: Getting John Dillinger became the top priority. As you saw in one of the letters from Hoover to my father, it was, "Get John Dillinger and the world is yours," and I think there was some very, very deep feelings there. It became almost a personal thing with my father because they lost John Dillinger at Little Bohemia.

NARRATOR: Little Bohemia was a place the FBI wanted to forget. In this house, Dillinger was surrounded. Instead of covering itself with glory, the Bureau was embarrassed, an agent was killed and the Bureau's public image badly damaged. Dillinger escaped again. The legend grew.

In a year-long crime spree across America's heartland, Dillinger had outrun and outwitted his pursuers. Hoover's only chance for redemption was to get Dillinger for good and have the story told his way. A lucky break and the trail finally ended here at the Biograph Theater in Chicago.

A bubble gum card told the story of Anna Sage, the "lady in red"

who tipped police to her movie date with Dillinger. Later, Hoover would have the story changed to eliminate the role of luck in the Bureau's ultimate triumph.

Mr. POWERS: You rarely have, in American history, instances of a problem being defined and then being solved in a way that was dramatically convincing to the American people, but that's what you had in the Dillinger case. You had a crime problem, you had a war on crime and then you had a victory in the war on crime.

Mr. PURVIS: After it was all over, a woman went up and dipped her handkerchief in Dillinger's blood as a souvenir and my father got sick when he saw that, I mean, physically sick.

NARRATOR: The first thing the G-men did was call the newspapers and claim credit for getting Dillinger. Hoover had discovered the importance of the press and of protecting his image.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: We have recently heard that it was a shame to kill a nice young man like John Dillinger. We have recently heard from certain sources — which should be aligned unalterably with the forces of law enforcement rather than lending aid and comfort to the foul hordes of crime — that the special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have a habit of running wild, of shooting men on sight and of issuing orders to kill this, that or the other person. There is only one answer and only one way to answer such maliciously untrue statements and that is to look at the official record.

NARRATOR: By the mid-30's, the official record was being controlled, if not written, by Hoover himself, leaving no doubt about who was commander-in-chief of the war on crime. There was no evidence of a great crime wave, but the public wasn't reading police reports, it was reading the newspapers and listening to the Chief G-man.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: With a personnel of less than 600 men arrayed against a pool numbering in the millions, it has been possible for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to carry on a successful campaign of detection and apprehension of the most deadly characters in the history of American Criminality.

NARRATOR: Hoover now controlled more than just the Bureau's image. He also controlled the crime statistics that proved his case, that made him indispensable. If the numbers were accurate, there had to be an FBI.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: There are 3,500,000 criminals actively at work in this country today. The main picture — the forbidding one — is that 1,500,000 felonies, major infractions, crimes worthy of penitentiary punishment which each year are committed within the boundaries of the United States.

NARRATOR: The numbers were overwhelming. No ordinary prison could hold these outlaws. Without Alcatraz, without Hoover, America was in danger.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: In the last few years, the power of gangdom reached such an estate that the predominant emotion throughout the country was that of fear. The depredations of vicious outlaws, roving from state to state like packs of wolves, amounted to an actual armed invasion of America.

NARRATOR: Hoover's America was constantly under siege, living in fear. For him, it was the central theme in a national melodrama. Hoover would tell his story again and again, dramatizing the problem and the solution. The public's enemies would walk the last mile to the death house, led by Hoover's FBI.

Mr. POWERS: So at that point, Hoover was able to reconstruct the whole history of the gangster period — the Kansas City massacre, the Machine-Gun Kelly case, Pretty Boy Floyd, Baby Face Nelson — and he and his writers were able to weave it all together into a kind of American *Odyssey* or an American *Iliad*, a kind of an epic in which you had a hero who saves his culture from the greatest enemy that can ever appear against him.

NARRATOR: This epic was Hollywood's. In an event as important to Hoover and the FBI as the capture of any real-life criminal, the word was out. Cagney, an actor known for his portrayal of gangsters, was changing sides.

1st ACTOR: *["G Men"]* I heard something about you today, lawyer.

JAMES CAGNEY: You did? What?

1st ACTOR: You're going to be a big G-man.

Mr. CAGNEY: That's right.

2nd ACTOR: You ought to be dumped in a ditch, stool pigeon.

1st ACTOR: Remember to keep your tin badge in Washington, if you come around here, sticking your puss in our affairs, you'll get a belly full of this. Now, beat it.

NARRATOR: The public enemy had become a public defender. Cagney's confidence fit the image of a government promising action and a New Deal for the American people. Hollywood and Hoover were ready. These weren't just movies, but the start of a New Deal for the FBI. The G-man as cultural hero became instant folklore, whether the enemy was Ma Barker—

ACTRESS: All right, Mr. G-man, you win.

3rd ACTOR: Get her coat.

NARRATOR: —or her sons.

4th ACTOR: They've got you, Tom, you're nailed. You don't' understand how the FBI works.

5th ACTOR: The FBI— they're way overrated.

4th ACTOR: They've track down every relative, every friend, everybody who's ever known you or Frost and the rest of us. They know everything about you, things you don't even know yourself.

NARRATOR: The FBI knew, even if the only clue was a glove.

6th ACTOR: I got a hunch about that glove. Got anything on it?

7th ACTOR: Yes, quite a bit. The man who wore it was six feet tall, weighed around 180 pounds, about 32 years old, had black hair, dark brown eyes and enjoyed vigorous health. And he drove a tractor, had a white horse and kept Belgian hares.

6th ACTOR: Are you sure he drove a tractor?

NARRATOR: Mythology came to replace history. In *"G" Men*, the movie, the Bureau's failure at Little Bohemia met a fiery rewrite. Hoover played his part in the newsreels. Week after week, there was no escaping the G-men and nothing was more important than an image of infallibility, the idea that a G-man could do anything.

Mr. ROSACK: When you get your badge and they finally let you keep your gun to take home to sleep with at night — I'm six feet five — I felt 10 feet tall. Hey, you're walking around, you've got all the power in the whole wide world.

NARRATOR: Hoover was taking his place in the American tradition of the detective hero, taking aim at a mass audience. He knew that myths didn't grow by themselves, that they needed nourishment and a good press.

Mr. TROHAN: He would release things to favored newspapermen and of course, in due time, he built himself quite a reputation without ever having made an arrest himself. Oh, I don't think he ever flashed a badge, as far as I know.

NARRATOR: As important to Hoover as a badge was a bibliography. *American Magazine* was the beginning. In 1933, Hoover was an unknown bureaucrat in charge of an obscure agency. A year later, he was among the most famous men in America. To become a public hero, he needed a public record, a byline. *The Story of the FBI* became Hoover's story, written by ghost writers like Courtney Ryley Cooper. More than anyone, Cooper created the official mythology of the bureau.

By the end of the decade, he had written 24 articles, four feature films and three books. The most influential was *Ten Thousand Public Enemies*. It popularized Hoover's vision of the FBI and reinforced a new role through the Bureau's Crime Records Division— public relations.

Fighting crime became one of the most politically effective of all New Deal programs, a grassroots movement in which the public enlisted with its fingerprints. Under Hoover's leadership, fingerprinting became an act of patriotism for Vice President Garner, for the famed aviator Amelia Earhart, for, it seemed, everyone.

Three thousand fingerprints a day came into the Bureau. By 1935, the total was eight million and climbing. In a door-to-door campaign that any elected official might envy, Hoover was building a constituency.

Mr. TROHAN: One of the most interesting things for the media was the police story, crime story. Crime sold newspapers like nothing else and the country was crime-conscious because crime stories captured indignation in the nation.

NARRATOR: The pulp magazines knew a hot property when they saw one. The public was captured by tales of daring and deduction. Crime and punishment became a cottage industry. This wasn't FBI headquarters, but a publishing house packaging clues, creating crimes for readers to solve. Everyone could be a G-man. Crime-solving was a national hobby — a pastime, a parlor game — and it was helping to turn Hoover into a household name.

In more than 200 personal scrapbooks, Hoover kept close watch on his reputation and on reporters. He had made the link between public relations and public support. Along with gangsters, he was hunting headlines.

The Bureau's files were open to reporters Hoover felt he could trust and closed to those who might want to go beyond the Bureau's official version. For Hoover, there were only friends and enemies.

Mr. POWERS: Hoover saw anyone who criticized the Bureau or who appeared in the bureaucracy as a rival to the Bureau, as not only an enemy to J. Edgar Hoover and the Bureau, but an enemy to America, perhaps to Christianity, maybe even to civilization itself.

NARRATOR: That included Melvin Purvis. He was the best-known agent in the Bureau's history, the man who'd been in charge of the FBI's Chicago office during the Dillinger case.

Mr. POWERS: Melvin Purvis was an agent who was given a name and a face by the media and this caused inevitable friction between the Director and Purvis which resulted in Purvis being ridden out of the agency. And I would say that Purvis, for the rest of his life, never quite knew what hit him.

NARRATOR: Purvis wrote his own history, but only after he was written out of the Bureau's. One thing Hoover wouldn't tolerate was a rival.

Mr. PURVIS: In the 1930's my father, was the most famous agent and Hoover felt that there was room in the FBI for only man to get the publicity and that was him. And finally, enough became enough. I think that the John Dillinger case almost did it and right after that, my father got Pretty Boy Floyd. I think that really did it.

Mr. POWERS: In a matter of months, he was out of the agency and pursuing a rather unsuccessful career on the fringes of entertainment and politics.

FILM ANNOUNCER: Shh— "Top Secrets of the FBI," reported by Melvin Purvis, former ace agent of the FBI and the man who got Dillinger.

NARRATOR: Purvis appeared to prosper, his G-man image intact, but he often didn't get the jobs he most wanted. Apparently, he never had a chance.

Mr. POWERS: When we look at his FBI file, we can find that there was a paper trail following Purvis of poor recommendations, slighting comments and the like from J. Edgar Hoover, so Purvis was someone who had become an enemy, as far as Hoover was concerned.

Purvis's wife, after Purvis's death, wrote Hoover a heartfelt letter, saying that, as far as she knew, Purvis always loved him, but Hoover didn't love Purvis.

NARRATOR: Hoover had once written Purvis, "Get Dillinger and the world is yours." A year later, Purvis was out of the Bureau. Twenty-five years after that, he killed himself, with the same pistol, it's said, he had carried at the Biograph Theater the night Dillinger was shot.

Mr. PURVIS: It became an absolute obsession with him and— which continued unabated until my father's death and as I said, it continued 10 years after his death. I think my father would have been a little flattered that Hoover was jealous of his ghost, but again, it went far beyond any jealousy I've ever known of and it became one of Hoover's main obsessions, unfortunately for my father.

EMCEE: Boys, we have a big surprise for you— the next gentleman, Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, the Head G-man.

SHRINER: Director J. Edgar Hoover, may we extend to you at this time our happy and sincere message of congratulations.

AWARD PRESENTER: Able lawyer, efficient organizer, capable executive, relentless pursuer of public enemies.

NARRATOR: In public life, Hoover had achieved celebrity and made it to vaudeville.

8th ACTOR: No, that's J. Edgar Hoover!

9th ACTOR: J.Edgar Hoover.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: All right, stand back. Well, now. Come out, you rat!

Mr. MURPHY: Hoover was a public relations genius. He understood that. He understood how the federal government worked, he understood publicity and he had the stage all to himself.

NARRATOR: Hoover was everywhere— for many, a subject of celebration; for others, of concern and satire.

SINGER: *[singing] Gee, but I'd like to be a G-man / And go bang, bang, bang, bang / Just like Dick Tracy, what a he-man / And go bang, bang, bang, bang / I do as I please / Act high-handed and regal / For when you're a G-man / There's nothing illegal / Gee, but I'd like to be a G-man / And go bang, bang, bang, bang / Say you won't talk, huh? / Bang, bang, bang bang / Outta the way, bud, let me get in that picture / Bang, bang, bang bang.*

NARRATOR: In time in Hoover's FBI, there was no room in the picture for anyone else and no room for criticism.

Mr. TROHAN: My city editor ordered me to do a piece on J. Edgar Hoover, the drugstore cowboy, so I went around to my friends in the Secret Service, the postal inspectors, the Treasury agents to pick up stories about J. Edgar Hoover. Of course, none of them liked him and all their stories were unfavorable, which is exactly what I wanted and I sat down and wrote, among other things, that Hoover would pose in front of the mirror to look stern and mighty and all-knowing for newspapermen.

A few days after it appeared, a fellow came to my office and he announced that he was with the FBI and I was his assignment, that he was trailing me and following me. Mr. Hoover was not above what you might call polite blackmail.

NARRATOR: With the press and with politicians, Hoover's tactics were paying off.

Sen. ARTHUR VANDENBERG, (R) Michigan: We want economy, but not at the expense of more crime to us. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the G-men are entitled to every penny they require and so far as I'm concerned, they shall have it.

NARRATOR: Despite threatened cuts in funding the FBI's 1936 budget was increased almost 20 percent. The power of Hoover's persuasion had spread to Capitol Hill.

Mr. TROHAN: But if a member of Congress strayed, Hoover would find out about it. Somebody would write in to the FBI, say, an opponent of this fellow or someone who didn't like him. Hoover would take that letter, go up and see the fellow and say, "This is the kind of stuff that comes in about you and of course, we know it isn't true and because it isn't true, we're showing it to you and here it is." And it was the truth and lay it down in front of him .Hoover never said anything more, but when the time came to vote for the FBI, the con-

gressman was in line.

NARRATOR: Along with a series of crime bills from Congress, Hoover had made it to the White House. The FBI and its Director had become symbols of the law. Without ever having to stand for election himself, Hoover had taken his place in the political life of the country. G-men had the nation covered.

FBI OPERATOR: Yes, this is National 7117. Hold the line, please. I'll connect you with Mr. Hoover.

NARRATOR: No federal agency had so measured the public's mood and responded so dramatically. Hoover's FBI had been installed as a national institution with its own police academy and crime labs. Few disputed the Bureau's professionalism or its scientific methods of investigation. Few recalled its failures or the days of the Palmer raids. Hoover now had a different record he could point to.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: Every kidnapping case brought to our attention has been solved. Bank robberies have been cut in half. Extortionists have been consistently apprehended and other forms of federal offenses have been vigorously prosecuted. Ninety-four of every 100 persons whom we have brought to trial are convicted.

NARRATOR: It was all there in the files, the Bureau's central records system, the well-publicized war on criminals. But that wasn't all. Hidden from public view was another records system that went back almost as far as the Bureau's beginnings. They were the confidential files, the records of surveillance and intelligence, of breakins and wiretaps and gossip— the investigations that looked into the political and personal lives of people who hadn't necessarily broken any laws.

Mr. POWERS: So, for much of the 1930's, Hoover was creating an internal security network that was unknown, that skirted the boundaries of legality and that was politically extremely controversial.

Mr. ROSACK: The so-called "secret files" of J. Edgar Hoover? I've never seen them. I've, of course, read allegations and all those stories about it. I've read about the stuff that's come out as a result of Freedom of Information requests.

I do know that Hoover did have information because people would talk to him. Politicians would talk to him, citizens would talk to him, businessmen would talk to him. There was a lot of information probably passed on about individuals in responsible positions. The actual secret files— where are they? I don't have any.

NARRATOR: But even then, questions were being asked about the Bureau's secret files and political dossiers kept on public officials, political activists, civil rights advocates, labor organizers and more.

Rep. EDWARDS: He had files on people that he considered to be, in his judgment, enemies of the United States, like Mrs. Roosevelt. When I was there, we had probably the biggest file on Mrs. Roosevelt of any American.

Mr. TROHAN: Hoover had a record of practically anybody who amounted to anything. There was a file on them in the Bureau. There was a good file on myself, which I have never seen, but there were files on millions of people.

NARRATOR: The files could be traced to the 1920's when the Bureau's surveillance operations were described as a secret police system, lawless in its methods, policies Hoover had been ordered to stop, but never did. Then, in the years prior to World War II, Hoover received verbal authority from President Roosevelt to gather domestic intelligence on possible subversive activities. That became the basis for the Bureau's political surveillance for decades to come.

Mr. ROSACK: The FBI was an intelligence-gathering agency. People expected us to know a lot about what was going on. It was, in effect, our duty to know what was going on.

NARRATOR: In the name of duty, Hoover's FBI collected information. For the most part, its use had less to do with law enforcement than with power politics.

Mr. MURPHY: Hoover knew all of these secrets about everybody and he kept the dossiers on elected officials of all kinds. There are no perfect human beings and he knew what might be in the President's background, even, or any Cabinet officer and all of the people in Congress. And if any of them wanted to oppose him too vigorously, something might be leaked about them that could be 20 years old.

Mr. TROHAN: They were afraid of him and often they were afraid he knew what he might not have known and they were afraid to cross him. Very few people crossed Mr. Hoover while he was alive.

NARRATOR: Fear of Hoover made him almost immune to at tack and bolder in his pursuit of a political agenda that included new public enemies, dangerous not for what they might be doing, but for they might be thinking. For many, Hoover had moved beyond accountability and above the law. The headlines raised an old and troubling issue— the difference between dissent and disloyalty.

Mr. MURPHY: There was not a true belief in the great value of dissent in a free society. There seemed to have been a belief — whether it was real or just something that served his purposes — for conformity and those who were not conforming and those, many of whom were working against abuses in the societies, such as racial injustice and economic injustice— many good people suffered because of Hoover's tactics.

NARRATOR: Before an assembly of Boy Scouts at the 1939 World's Fair, Hoover appeared as a superhero whose cause had become nothing less than his vision of America.

J. EDGAR HOOVER: The Stars and Stripes represents Liberty and Justice. Old Glory still waves triumphantly over the land of the free and the home of the brave. It stands for everything that is good.

Americans should be prouder than ever of America today and should fight to defend her ideals. And the traitors in our midst who stand for lawlessness and subversive-ism, we must turn upon the scoundrels who would destroy Americanism. Only the young can win in a war. This is your war for a better America. Step in and win it.

NARRATOR: For Hoover, the war would never end. Over the years, the meaning of Americanism would be tested time and time again.

It was the end of a decade, the era of the G-men. With the help of a

public looking for heroes, Hoover created his own legend. Any doubts about his role in American life and politics seem lost in a hail of gunfire and publicity. In the glory of the G-men, Hoover built a bureaucratic empire where none had ever before existed, a police presence that aroused the fears of criminals and ordinary citizens alike. In the end, a portrait of J. Edgar Hoover would inspire both adulation and alarm. Entrusted with upholding the law, he often became a law unto himself. He ruled the FBI almost unchallenged until his death in 1972 and came to occupy a dark and hidden corridor of power in 20th century America.

CREDITS

Written and Produced by ..... IRV DRASNIN
Associate Producer ..... JANIS RUDEN
Editor ..... PETER ODABASHIAN
Camera ..... TOM SPAIN, RICHARD LERNER, NED JOHNSTON
Sound ..... ROGER PHENIX, LEN SCHMITZ, MARIO CARDENAS, G.J. COLLENBERGER, ANDREW FREDERICKS
Assistant Editors ..... DENA KATZEN, SHEILA MOLONEY
Assistant Camera .. ANDREW FREDERICKS, MELISSA DONOVAN
Production Manager ..... SMOKEY FORESTER
Film Research ..... KAREN WYATT, LORENA PARLEE JOYCE COMPTON
Narrator ..... IRV DRASNIN
Re-recordist ..... MEL ZELNICKER, SOUND ONE

Archival Footage:
Archive Films New York
John E. Allen
National Archives
Twentieth Century Fox Movietonews, Inc.
UCLA Film and Television Archive

Archival Music:
TRF Production Music Libraries
Music Library and Sound Recording Archives,
Bowling Green State University

"When I Grow Up (G-Man)" by Harold Rome
Florence Music/Warner Chappell Music

Still Photographs:
Culver Pictures
National Archives
UPI/Bettmann
Wide World Photos

Acknowledgements:
New York Public Library
Northwestern University Library
Time, Inc.

Consultant ..... RICHARD GID POWERS
Video Conforming ..... WAYNE LAX, JIM POKOWSKI
ALLIED FILM & VIDEO

for THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Post-Production ..... HARLAN REINIGER, EILEEN MULVEY
Field Production ..... LARRY LECAIN
CHAS NORTON, BOB McCAUSLAND
Graphic Design ..... CHRIS PULLMAN, ALISON KENNEDY
Videotape Editors ..... DAN WATSON, BRAD HAWES
Series Theme ..... CHARLES KUSKIN
Unit Manager ..... LISA JONES
Senior Researcher ..... JANE FEINBERG
Project Administration ..... CORI COUTURE, NANCY FARRELL
LETTY HUMMEL, ANN SCOTT
Publicity ..... MICHAEL SHEPLEY, P.R.
KATHY GERHARDT
Associate Producer ..... LAURIE KAHN-LEAVITT
Staff Producer ..... JUDITH QUAIN
Coordinating Producer ..... SUSAN MOTTAU
Series Editor ..... LLEWELLYN SMITH
Senior Producer ..... MARGARET DRAIN
Executive Producer ..... JUDY CRICHTON

A Drasnin Production, Inc.
for
THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

WGBH Educational Foundation
and WNET/Thirteen
© 1991 All Rights Reserved

UCLA Drasnin
DR200408